

Testimony of Patty O'Brian
Alzheimer's Association Connecticut Chapter
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
Wednesday February 23, 2022

Honorable Chairmen, Ranking Members, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Patty O'Brian and I am a volunteer advocate for the Alzheimer's Association CT Chapter and a Dementia Specialist for Hartford Healthcare Center for Health Aging.

The Alzheimer's Association leads the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia — by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the budget proposal regarding the Alzheimer's State Respite Program.

Thank you for allowing us to provide comment on H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 regarding the Alzheimer's State Respite Program.

More than 80% of the help provided to older adults in the United States comes from family members, friends, or other unpaid caregivers — and nearly half of families caring for an older adult are caring for someone with dementia.

In my professional job, one of the referrals I make on a weekly basis is to the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program. This allows the clients I work with, help in securing and paying for staff to come into the home, paying for adult day programs and the much needed time away from Caregiving. For many of my caregiver clients, this program is a life line to their own mental/ physical health. Caregiving for an individual with dementia is a 24/7 job with little to no breaks.

Many of my caregiver clients put their own health after the needs of their loved ones with dementia. We know that early intervention on many chronic diseases is key in managing ones health. I hear from my caregiver clients, I can't leave my loved one home and the cost of care is too much for me to hire right now. I can wait on my wellness visit, or mammogram or follow up from an Emergency visit with my own doctor right now. I have had two primary caregivers pass away from heart attacks this past year.

I have, also, seen at the Center for Healthy Aging, the benefits of the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program. One of my caregiver clients will go to the gym while her husband is at the day program paid for by the Alzheimer's Respite Care Program. In this scenario, both client and caregiver are taking care of their mental and physical well-being. Another caregiver client has recently been diagnosed with cancer, she uses her funds to have staff come into her home so she can go to her many doctors' appointments.

Respite services provide temporary, substitute care that gives the caregiver a break from his or her caregiving duties. The services can be provided in a variety of settings, including the individual's home, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes. This temporary relief enables caregivers to ensure their loved ones continue to receive quality care while giving themselves an opportunity to manage and improve their own health which is often compromised. Caregivers of people with dementia are twice as likely to report substantial emotional, financial, and physical difficulties as caregivers of people without dementia.

We know increasing the funding for this program is vitally needed to meet the growing numbers of people who will be impacted. Additionally, we'd like to recommend increased transparency on where the dollars are in the budget to accurately reflect the utilization.

Increasing funding for this program to meet the growing needs of Connecticut's changing demographics is good policy, fiscally smart, and supports a person's wish to age in place with dignity.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide comment today.